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PROMOTING AMERICANIZATION

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Women throughout the country have wakened up to the fact that, however we may feel as to the degree of coast defences and standing armies needed, we should recognize that quite as important as forts and submarines is our national attitude of mind. Quite as important as the standing army is that we have *one nation* instead of *many peoples*.

We have begun to realize that peoples living side by side do not necessarily constitute the nation, and that the factory and mine are not the only or necessarily the best medium for making citizens. It is being borne in upon our minds that in the efficient and harmonious union of many peoples in a common defense of any one nation there are at least three prime essentials: a common language with a minimum amount of illiteracy; a common citizenship, including similar ideals, beliefs, standards and customs, and symbolized by the oath of allegiance to America; and a high standard of living, which, in a democratic country, tends to diminish disaffection and disloyalty at critical times and at strategic points.

The organized women of the country seem to be looked to for the forwarding of what we might call the new citizenship movement; aiding that movement, we find the middle ground upon which members of defense organizations and members of peace leagues can whole-heartedly agree—the need of raising the standards of American citizenship.

There are in the country 5,439,801 foreign-born women of 15 years or over. When they arrive with their families, the husband goes to work and almost immediately establishes contacts which give him a view of America. His mind opens, he begins to master his American environments. The children are put in a public school—they form friendships with American-born children, they learn American ways and soon they are the arbiters in all family matters to be decided according to American standards. They, instead of the parents, become the custodians and sources of author-

ity, and family discipline breaks down. The mother is the slave of all work; she forms the dull old-world background of her American family—who often become ashamed of it and of her. She does not learn English: she gets the left-overs of America from her progressive family; she does not become Americanized; she does not absorb new ideals and ideas; she learns little about American foods and about ways for caring for her children in the new and very different climate. It is not unusual after fifteen years in this country to find English spoken by every member of the family but mother, and American clothes worn by all but mother. Even this superficial distinction closes many doors to her. Her grown-up daughter in a highly Americanized hat does not want to go shopping with her mother who still wears a black shawl over her head. It is not that the mother looks so ugly, but that the clinging to the old black shawl typifies to the daughter her mother's whole lack of understanding of the new world and the new ideas in which the daughter is living. The mother, far from being an aid in Americanizing her family, becomes a reactionary force. Sadly or obstinately as it may be, but always ignorantly, she combats every bit of Americanism that her husband and children try to force into the Southern European home. Yet when the husband passes tests entitling him to citizenship she becomes a full-fledged citizen also, as do her children—all prepared but the mother.

The United States Bureau of Education, the National Americanization Committee, the Bureau of Naturalization and other organizations interested in the immigrant—in the elimination of illiteracy and in the conversion of the immigrant into the fairly educated citizen—turn to the club women of the country for practical help.

What good those club women can do in the way of definite work to promote this real Americanization, especially among the immigrant women, can be placed somewhat in this wise: Find out how many immigrant women there are in the community. Do they speak English? Do their husbands? Are their husbands naturalized? Is the home a Southern European or an American home? Is the family American in its loyalty? Does it know enough of America to be loyal to it? Undoubtedly the children speak English; but what is the real nature of their Americanism? Did they learn it chiefly at school and at home—or on the corner and in the

pool room? Reach the immigrant woman. It is the only way to produce American homes. See that she learns English. Through it she gets her first American contacts. But immigrant women can rarely attend night school. Organize for them, as has been done in a number of places, classes from two to three in the afternoon.

Just as immigrant men are taught English successfully only when the instruction deals with the subject matter of their daily life and work, so the method of teaching English to women can best be associated with methods of housekeeping, cooking, sewing, etc. Moreover, many American standards and customs can be brought to the immigrant woman in this way. She can really be initiated into Americanism and the language at once.

Especially at first it will be very difficult to get immigrant women to attend classes in the public schools—and so at first, and perhaps later also,—there must be friendly visitors and teachers, “domestic educators” as they have been called, to carry the English language and American ways of caring for babies, ventilating the house, preparing American vegetables, instead of the inevitable cabbage, right into the new homes. The state of California has through its department of public education provided for these friendly visitors. Until other places with heavy immigrant population act with similar enlightenment, may not women’s clubs step in and blaze the trail for a public education policy? Can they not pay domestic educators, or meet local boards of education half way in so doing? They can organize mothers’ classes, cooking classes, sewing classes, classes for entertainment. Remember that immigrant women, if of different races, often know one another even less than they know Americans.

Make immigrant women good citizens. Help them make the homes they care for into American homes. Give their children American ideals at home, as well as in school. Make American standards of living prevail *throughout* the community, not merely in the “American sections.” Above all show the rest of the community that this work of Americanizing immigrant mothers and immigrant homes is in the highest sense a work of citizenship, a part of a *national* patriotic ideal.

The relationship of Americanizing the foreign-born women in their homes to all the aspects of the development of our industries

is tremendous, and will become more and more clear to us as being the work to which we should set our hands. American industry, of course, has made the population of this country what it is today—some one hundred million people drawn from many countries, about one sixth of them born in foreign lands.

The sign language in factories, the foreign language and the padrone in the labor camps, villages and colonies scattered throughout cities; several million non-citizens and non-voters living and working under laws in the making of which they have no voice, of which they have little knowledge, and for which they sometimes have little respect; thousands of naturalized voters, but with no real American contact or American understanding, marshalled and voted in companies by American bosses—all these conditions, now prevalent and typifying our failure to assimilate our immigrant population, are not chargeable to industry.

But industry is the force in American life which has the remedy chiefly in its control. And only the organized assistance of industry can make it possible for this country within any reasonable time to unify the present heterogeneous factors in our national life, and substitute for a babel of tongues the English language; substitute for a half-dead loyalty to the familiar old country—and a half-alive loyalty to the unknown new one—an understanding and unequivocal American citizenship; for old country homes in American cities and mill and mining towns, American homes with American standards of living; for the vague mixture of memories and aspirations that characterizes these men without a country, a vivid and alert American patriotism.

In the work of Americanization, so long neglected, now so urgent, industry has the strategic position. Many functions of government and society are concerned with Americanization—and are perhaps primarily responsible for it, such as our public schools, our employment systems, our courts, our social protective organizations. But most of these have no direct or influential or authoritative approach to the immigrant, unless he becomes a public charge. The employer has. The gist of the whole situation lies in this. And it is to the employer that the nation now turns for immediate aid and coöperation in the gravest task that the country has faced since 1861—the necessity of reinforcing our national unity, of making our many peoples one nation, marked from coast to coast by a

common language, a common acceptance of industrial standards, a common understanding of the rights and obligations of American citizenship.

But this fact remains: the Americanization of our foreign-born workmen, even so far as teaching English, merely, is concerned, is too vast a project for the individual industry. Industries vary in wealth, equipment, stability of labor, hours, and in a dozen other ways. Teaching the English language and citizenship to immigrant workmen *is a legitimate part of public policy*. It belongs to the public schools and the courts of every community, aided by every civic force. The greatest service the industries of any community can render to themselves, to the social destiny of their community, and to the cause of our national solidarity is to back their organized support solidly up against the public school system in its task of making English-speaking residents and citizens of every family in the community. Americanization is a civic matter. The need of it now is a national crisis.

The swiftest hope of Americanization lies in the active practical coöperation of employers, the public schools, the courts, and bodies of patriotic citizens. In this work of preparedness it will often be left to industries to take the initiative. It is their privilege to do so.

It is the privilege and it is the duty of club women to give their time, their powers of instruction and their enthusiasm to the work of getting our language and understanding of the principles of our common life into the hearts and minds of the foreign-born women. Once start these foreign women in the paths of learning and your task is not difficult; they believe in you, and after a little while will break away from their hide-bound traditions and will become plastic for your moulding.

It is always touching to attend a class of foreign-born women with wistful faces and childlike faith in the instructors, trying, oh, so intently, to follow the sounds of the letters and words, and to trace those letters and words from the blackboard. The progress made by hard-working housemothers, who slip away from their many duties for a half hour or hour in the afternoon on certain days of the week, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by school or other social center is simply marvelous. The reading aloud by them of the word or of the simple sentence, the struggle to get just the right inflection, the giving of themselves to this great

effort, is a tremendous thing to see. It is courage personified—it is the keen desire to keep up with their children, to know for themselves the things they are living in the midst of, to get to a point of writing and speaking a common language. And you never fail to see all this in any little class of foreign-born adult women.

Well circumstanced men and women of any community, to help in this development of citizenship is not an isolated piece of welfare work directed toward the alien group by the more fortunate of the community, but the sharing of rights and traditions and principles by Americans with Americans.